

Released for afternoon papers of Oct. 22, 1915.

Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

SILVER FOX FARMING.

Washington, D. C., Those thinking of engaging in fox farming as a source of profit should consider carefully the cautions and the data as to the expense of equipping a farm, and would do well to weigh carefully the conservative statements as to the profits from this industry, which are included in U. S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin 301, The Domestication of the Silver Fox.

The bulletin points out that the prices of furs and of breeding animals ~~have~~ fallen considerably since July, 1914, and states that the prices running into thousands of dollars formerly paid for live silver foxes were based not on the fur value of the animals, but on their possibilities as breeding animals, in an industry in which there was great speculative excitement. On this general point the author says: "The business of fox breeding will be on a much more stable basis than at present when the value of breeding animals bears an approximate relation to the value of their pelts in the open market. The profits in silver fox farming prior to 1910 were realized mainly from the sale of pelts; since then, they have been derived almost entirely from the sale of live foxes for breeding purposes. There has been a recent sharp decline in the prices of breeding stock."

The choice of location of a fox farm is of prime importance. The best furs come from cool, moderately humid regions. If a locality furnishes native furs of high grade, that locality is favorable to the domestication of fur bearers. The climate of the Middle and Southern States is not well suited to this industry, as shown by the medium or low prices commanded by furs from these areas. The ratio of expense to income must be considered with care. One can not pay the exorbitant prices animals for stocking purposes sometimes bring and expect to raise fur at a profit. Neither can one expect to raise furs of a fine quality from inferior stock. But given a normal market for breeding-stock and pelts, a favorable location, a love for animals, and an ordinary degree of prudence, one may engage in black or silver fox farming with a good prospect of satisfactory returns, provided, of course, a high price for pelts is sustained. Values of animals and pelts were very high a few

years ago, when the industry was being launched, but are now on a much lower basis. Those who contemplate going actively into the business or investing their money in corporations or companies organized for fox farming should investigate thoroughly all phases of the business.

The records show that 133 silver fox skins of all grades offered in 1914 at a London auction sale realized an average value of only \$118 each.

The silver fox is simply a color phase of the common red fox. The name "silver fox" as commonly used by furriers, includes the dark phases of the ordinary red fox variously called silver, silver gray, silver black, or black, and is not to be confused with the gray, or tree fox, the fur of which is of comparatively little value. The red, the typical cross fox, the silver, and the black fox all interbreed and when one occurs occasional examples of the others may be expected. This fact can be used, as the bulletin points out, to develop silvers by cross mating, and selective breeding is important to produce silver progeny. Breeding to produce less nervous animals, as well as to produce fine pelts, must be considered.

The most valuable skins are those in which the entire pelage is dark at the base and overlaid with grayish white. The black skins recently have fallen below silvers because furriers find they can dye red skins black. Silver foxes can be raised wherever the red foxes live in the wild state but will produce superior fur only in regions where the fox naturally produces a superior fur. Records of the Biological Survey show that such localities occur only north of the southern boundary of the Canadian Zone. This boundary, as shown by a map in the bulletin, crosses the States of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and South Dakota, and extends southward along the mountains in New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and in all the States of the Rocky Mountain region and westward. South of the forested regions of the northern tier of States and western Oregon, however, the Canadian Zone, although sufficiently cold, is too dry and sunny for the production of first-class fur. In the Transition Zone, a region less cold, foxes having a fair quality of fur may be raised, but the best are obtained only in more northern latitudes.

To raise silver foxes calls for a pair of foxes, which will

cost from \$150 to \$250 each for the common silvers, up to several thousand dollars each for the best silvers. The yards in which they are kept must have high and strong wire-net or board fences with an overhang at the top to prevent the foxes from crawling over. These fences either have to be sunk in the ground or the fence wire has to be extended as a mat on the ground to prevent the animals from digging under. The cost of yards runs from \$100 to \$150 each, which includes the making of the special dens needed for the animals. The equipment is described in detail in the bulletin. The chief requirements for a fox farm are well-drained, wooded land in a secluded section where the foxes, which are inclined to be nervous, will not be subject to outside disturbance. The fox ranch must have good drainage and must be partially shaded by a young growth of deciduous trees. Each pair of foxes should have a runway of about 2,500 square feet, and provision should be made for separating them. One reason for properly equipping the yards and locating them away from outside interference is the fact that the vixen is very nervous about her cubs and frequently mishandles and kills them in attempts to hide them from imaginary dangers. Attendance is an important feature because foxes do not tame readily and rarely become friendly. Constant change of persons in charge, like the presence of absolute strangers, has a detrimental effect on them.

Foxes require some special attention, certain skill in handling, and great care in feeding. They thrive on a varied diet, including meat, fish, mush, milk, bread, and table scraps, but they are easily injured, especially when young, by improper food. It costs from \$5 to \$15 a year to feed foxes, depending on whether there are cows and whether grain and vegetables are raised on the farm. The fixed annual charge against a pair of foxes will vary with the locality and value of equipment, etc. On some ranches it has been estimated about as follows:

Interest on cost of yards.....	\$10
Depreciation of yards.....	10
Food.....	20
Attendance.....	50
<hr/>	
Amounting to.....	\$90

To this must be added a reasonable charge for interest on the original cost of the foxes.

The young are born in April or May, the average litter containing four cubs, but, as only about half of the captive females produce young in any given year, the annual increase on fox farms has not averaged above 100 per cent.

##